Inaugural Workshop

ON THE CROSSROADS BETWEEN SOCIOLOGY AND AESTHETICS:

A Laboratory of IdEAs and PracticEs

Aula Magna, Dipartimento di Scienze Politiche Via Serafini 3, 56126 Pisa

Organizing Comitee:
Vincenzo Mele (Unipi)
Sonia Andras (MSCA/Unipi)
Francesco Azzarone (SNS/Unipi)
Dayami De León (UNAM/Unipi)

NOVEMBER 6th

Institutional greetings 15:30
Andrea Borghini (Chair of PS Department)
Domenico Secondulfo (Board AIS Immaginario)
Introduction: (Vincenzo Mele, Unipi)

Sociological Aesthetics: the Reasons for a Laboratory 16:00
Vincenzo Mele

Five Bucharest in a decade (1939-1949): city identity through fashion 16:45
Sonia Andras (MSCA Fellow, Unipi)

Sensing and making sense through a social form 17:15
Olga Sabido Ramos (UAM-Azcapotzalco)

Power, illusio, and affectivity in the work of Pierre Bourdieu 17:45
Juan Pablo Vazquez (Universidad Iberoamericana, México)

Paradoxes of Fashion: What about dupes? 18:30
Dayami De León Rico (UNAM, México)

Conclusions & Light Dinner 1G:00

NOVEMBER 7th

0G:30 **Antonio Banfi's Social Aesthetics**
Barbara Carnevali (EHESS, Paris)

10:00 **Shame and Beauty**
Annika Schlitte (Universität Greifswald)

10:30 **Building Bridges between Sociology and Aesthetics: the case of Landascape**
Eduardo de la Fuente (University of South Australia)

11:00 **Abductive Knowledge and the Political Dimension of Simmel's 'Aesthetics'. Some Remarks on Simmel's "Sociological Aesthetics"**
Tim-Florian Steinbach (Uni-Wuppertal)

11:30 **The social in art and the art of the social. Aesthetics in public space**
Letteria Fassari, Emanuela Spanò (Uni Roma, La Sapienza)

12:00 **Sociological Aesthetics and the Freedom of the Moderns**
Francesco Azzarone (SNS, Pisa)

12:30 **Neo-phenomenological sociology and methodological issues. "Blind shadowing," a case study**
Michele Granzotto (Università di Napoli Federico II)

13:00 **Light Lunch**

14:00 **Conclusive Roundtable**

Meeting URL

https://teams.microsoft.com/l/team/19%3AWL2ZUxusf4D8-U1gAiXkHloamEpi0RNV8eXO_YrFwag1%40thread.tacv2/conversations?groupId=a7d3d08d-4ff3-4599-8841-_45_9__ccffc2da6stenantId=c7456b31-a220-47f5-be52-473828670aa1

Five Bucharest in a Decade (1939-1949): City Identity trough Fashion: Part I

Conference Presentation: “On the Crossroads between Sociology and Aesthetics: a Laboratory of Ideas and Practices” (6-7 November 2025), Department of Political Science, University of Pisa

SONIA D. ANDRAS

JUN 05, 2026

Proofread text with updated references (as of 5 June 2026)

FIVE Bucharests in a Decade: Fashioning Romanian Urban Cultures, 1939-1949 (FIVEBUC) proposes a comprehensive study of Bucharest’s identity through fashion across five distinct eras from 1939 to 1949 and emphasises the city’s European social and cultural influences. It highlights how fashion reflected the spirit of the times and the evolving ideals of Bucharest in its complex negotiations with both East and West, at the onset, during, and after the Second World War, amid the succession of totalitarian regimes during only one decade, covering the ideological spectrum from the extreme right to the left. It analyses Romania’s evolution from 1939 to 1949 through the lens of fashion, reflecting Bucharest’s identity, Western influences, and the impacts of right-wing culture and democratic decline, examining everyday life in Romania, the competition using interwar-established media like Hollywood and beauty pageants for women’s attention[1] and submission on both extreme sides of the ideological spectrum. It distinguishes between fashion, dress, and costume, presenting Bucharest’s fashion as a marker of modernity[2]. FIVEBUC recognises the city’s complexity and contributes to understanding Romanian society within a European

context, focusing on the socio-cultural changes during the specified decade, emphasising the interdisciplinary nature of fashion, and addressing under-explored aspects of Central and Eastern European culture, particularly from a gendered perspective.

Building on the previous research focusing on the interwar era (1919 – 1939), FIVEBUC will employ sociological aesthetics and analyses of visual and textual discourse to interpret Romanian culture through the lens of fashion, examining both aesthetic and social forms[3]. It will draw primarily on the theorisations of Georg Simmel[4], Walter Benjamin[5], Theodor W. Adorno[6], and Pierre Bourdieu[7] to emphasise how subtle details can reveal more profound truths, as well as Carlo Ginzburg's method of "micro history"[8], focusing on physiognomy and highlighting often-overlooked aspects of culture. Unlike traditional approaches that prioritise obvious cultural elements, this framework will consider non-rational and subtle cultural expressions, including styles and mythologies. Fashion will serve as a critical lens for understanding the spatial (socioeconomic connections) and temporal (representations of the past and future) dimensions of modern society, reflecting the interplay of political, social, and cultural systems during times of change. The multiple Bucharests will therefore weave a five-part story of social, cultural, aesthetic, emotional and ideological upheavals. These rapid shifts over only a decade will illustrate the permeability of what is perceived as established and stable reality. This serves as a cautionary historical lesson about the twentieth century and an opportunity to establish a coherent framework for understanding the present's eerily similar twenty-first-century contexts and planning for the future in Romania, the rest of Europe and beyond.

The first Bucharest, spanning from 1939 to 1940, occurred during the last year of peace in Romania and was characterised by the right-wing royal dictatorship of King Carol II, who had been consolidating power since 1933. This era was marked by the imposition of censorship, restrictive measures on civil liberties, and the political repression of

dissent. At the same time, fascism and nationalism were gaining traction, laying the ideological foundation for Romania's future authoritarian transformations.

Following this, the second Bucharest emerged between 1940 and 1941, coinciding with the National Legionnaire State that arose after the removal of King Carol II. This period saw the rise of the Iron Guard in alliance with General Ion Antonescu, as the regime aligned itself closely with Nazi Germany. During this time, the Romanian Orthodox Church was elevated to a central institutional role, and the nation witnessed a significant intensification of fascist ideology, marked by antisemitism and violent repression. Notably, Romania began its initial participation in the Holocaust during this phase.

The third Bucharest, from 1941 to 1944, was under the regime of Ion Antonescu. This period began with the suppression of the Iron Guard and the establishment of a right-wing military dictatorship. Romania's collaboration with Nazi Germany deepened significantly, as the country contributed troops to the Eastern Front. The regime maintained its policies of repression and antisemitism, further consolidating authoritarian control and entrenching Romania's role in the Axis war effort.

As the fourth Bucharest took shape between 1944 and 1947, the tide began to turn with the arrest and execution of Ion Antonescu, leading to Romania's strategic realignment away from the Axis powers. This period was characterised by increasing Soviet influence and occupation, which intensified involvement in Romanian affairs. The monarchy was ultimately dismantled, paving the way for the emergence of Communist structures that began to dominate the political landscape, culminating in the consolidation of Soviet-backed authority.

Finally, the fifth Bucharest, which lasted from 1947 to 1989, marked the establishment of the People's Republic of Romania. It began with Communist-controlled elections and the imposition of Stalinist

governance. The regime enforced violent collectivisation and nationalisation, suppressing dissent while restructuring Romanian society according to Soviet ideological lines. This authoritarian system persisted until the collapse of Communism in 1989, leaving a profound and lasting impact on the nation's political and social fabric.

My PhD research, which crystallised into a book, described Bucharest as a city of multiplicity, with its varied histories highlighted by chroniclers throughout the ages. Walking through the city offers a sense of crossing different spaces and eras. The city's evolution reflects a living organism that encompasses diverse experiences, particularly in women's stories, which can vary significantly based on perspective. However, this diversity was not always evident and was inconsistent, in constant flow as the city itself, in the so-called 'Little Paris' spaces of early-twentieth-century Bucharest where the West could be experienced through the senses[9]. My research so far, for and around what has come to be included in the book, has been focusing on the cultural and political landscape of interwar Bucharest, tracing the city's transformation through the lenses of gender, fashion, and urban life. It situated Greater Romania within its post-First World War geopolitical context, highlighting its paradoxical identity between East and West and between tradition and modernity. I had explored Bucharest's urban development through its diverse realities, paying particular attention to women's fashion practices, public spaces, and the gendered dimensions of modernity. The evolution from the modern girl to the new woman reflected shifting middle-class ideals and nationalistic aspirations. Beyond the social, cultural, and ideological aspects, I had examined literary and artistic representations of women across literature, focusing on novels, especially lesser-known or written by lesser-known writers, diaristic writing, portraiture, and performance. This part of my research has revealed the relationship between visibility, creativity, and political symbolism. Another important topic was the emergence of film and photography as industrial art forms, showing how Romanian women had participated in and influenced visual modernity. Throughout

research so far, I have emphasised fashion-consuming bourgeois women as central figures in Bucharest's modern reinvention, bridging fashion studies with Romanian cultural history.

About the relationship between culture, materiality, and methodology, emphasising the iconic turn and micro-histories while noting the observer's role in research, I am particularly moved by Jeffrey Alexander's concept of culture as the "dark matter" of the social universe[10]. I am exploring how to incorporate principles from quantum physics, notably Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, into FIVEBUC's narrative framework. Another methodological question I will explore is how perspective shapes historical truth; it examines the cultural impact of magazine horoscopes in Romania since 1947 during crises. This tumultuous decade highlights the immateriality of fashion, which sells dreams and ideas, complicating the understanding of culture in the material world. Throughout my research, I have come to understand that fashion is deeply intertwined with politics, affecting levels from the personal to the national, even if its domain is itself transnational[11] and, it could be argued, trans-historical. One area of particular interest to me is the exploration of Romanian equivalents of symbolic resistance, akin to the White Rose movement in Nazi Germany and to Sophie Scholl. There is a significant gap in existing research on Romanian fashion and popular culture during this decade, particularly beyond ideological and wartime discussions. My goal is to incorporate innovative primary sources and draw new conclusions, thereby contributing to knowledge of Romania and the era.

Go to Part II

Thanks for reading FIVEBUC! Subscribe for free to receive new posts (including the Part II coming next!) and support my work.

Subscribed

1 Sonia D. Andraș, 'Fashion, Cinema, and German-American Propaganda in 1930s Bucharest', *Anuarul Institutului de Cercetări Socio-Umane »Gheorghe Șincai« al Academiei Române* 25 (December 2022): 211–35; '*Roberta* at the Capitol and Roxy: Fashion, Cinema, and Modernity in Interwar Bucharest', *Anuarul Institutului de Cercetări Socio-Umane »Gheorghe Șincai« al Academiei Române* 26 (December 2023): 163–85, https://www.doi.org/10.59277/ICSUGh.Sincai.26.11.

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Five Bucharest in a Decade (1939-1949): City Identity trough Fashion: Part II

Conference Presentation: “On the Crossroads between Sociology and Aesthetics: a Laboratory of Ideas and Practices” (6-7 November 2025), Department of Political Science, University of Pisa

SONIA D. ANDRAS

JUN 05, 2026

Continuation from Part I

Click here to read Part I

Fashion acts not only as an agent of political expression but also as a marker of ideological positions, offering more than just aesthetic or emotional significance. This understanding will inform my interpretation as I will trace the roots of Romania’s political tolerance and mindset through the lens of fashion and those individuals involved in the field, both within Romania and internationally, specifically in the years surrounding 1939 and the 1940s. This line of inquiry may require exploring Romanian discourse and analysing the political positions of various designers. For instance, I aim to investigate the implications of Coco Chanel’s Nazi sympathies and connections[1] alongside the ideological stances of figures like Elsa Schiaparelli[2] and Sonia Delaunay, the latter in her connections to Romania[3] and as a key figure in crafting the evolving ‘new woman’ models from Greater Romania into the People’s Republic[4]. Another compelling case study I have recently examined is Nivea’s Aryan beauty messaging and its racially charged legacy, particularly how its branding evolved under the pressures

imposed by the Nazi regime and has not changed course even to this day[5]. The project will provide a platform for a gendered analysis of Dior's New Look, raising questions about whether it represented a regression in patriarchal values or a recovery of postwar aesthetics. I wish to delve into the reasons behind the male dominance that emerged in fashion design since the 1940s, acknowledging exceptions like Chanel, though her continued success may be attributed as much to her interwar career. I have also researched the history of Rockefeller Foundation nursing fellows in interwar Romania, and I find it fascinating to trace their trajectories into the 1940s and beyond[6]. This inquiry is rooted in the connections between beauty, eugenics, and the broader medical fields, creating a rich tapestry of interrelated themes worthy of exploration.

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My ongoing inquiry into ethics, gender, and representation in fashion has led me to consider whether the fashion industry is inherently immoral, and I have noted critiques from both radical feminists and the far right. Through dedicated theoretical texts, I have observed a connection between fashion, originality, and mechanisms of social inclusion and exclusion, in one case drawing on ideas from Simmel and Marthe Bibesco[7], and in the other through the recent change from *Vogue Paris* to *Vogue France*[8]. I recognise fashion as a subtle medium for ideological alignment or dissent, a perspective that seems particularly relevant when examining the dynamics of the 1940s. As I delve deeper into this exploration, I am particularly interested in how perceptions of women's changeability in fashion shaped discourse in interwar Romania, and I plan to investigate what has transformed and what has persisted

from the 1940s into the era of the People's Republic of Romania. A striking observation I have recently made is the disappearance of women from Nivea advertisements in Romania around 1941, a trend that coincided with a shift towards promoting male grooming products[9]. Consequently, I find myself compelled to research Nivea's nationalisation during Communist Romania, as well as its subsequent rebranding as Norvea following litigation in the 1990s. Although Norvea's ongoing presence in Romanian pharmacies, even in 2025, may not strictly fall within FIVEBUC's purview, I aim to explore the roots of this phenomenon, which is likely connected to the Fifth Bucharest.

In my research on interwar Romania, I have developed preliminary assumptions about the continuity of practices, ideas, structures, and individual contributions during this dynamic period. My exploration will seek to confirm or challenge these ideas as I delve deeper into the primary materials. One crucial aspect to investigate is what has changed and what has remained similar or the same between the interwar era and FIVEBUC's timeline. Specifically, I aim to understand how each of the Five Bucharests influenced interwar realities, particularly in fashion and beauty. This includes examining the lives and work of individuals involved in these fields, such as fashion retailers, designers, tailors and seamstresses, beauty practitioners, and, notably in a rising far-right and then far-left Romanian context, eugenicists and Rockefeller-founded nurses (introducing the three-year nursing education system promoted by the Rockefeller Foundation). I also aim to explore any connections or correlations between the processes of Romanianisation during the interwar and early 1940s, marked by Nazism and antisemitism, and the later Nationalisation and Collectivisation movements under Stalinism. As I continue my investigation, I will also focus on emerging relevant practices, ideas, structures, and individuals throughout the Five Bucharests and trace their subsequent evolution. A critical question to consider is also how the regimes in the Five Bucharests impacted the individuals who worked in these areas. I will focus on how and why one's ideological stance determines whether one

is permitted or tolerated to pursue activities related to fashion and beauty. Another theme I am exploring is the evolution of advice literature throughout the five Bucharests, in constant movement, on a spectrum between agency and coercion[10]. Furthermore, I plan to analyse markers of fashionability, dress, beauty, and societal acceptability for each of the Five Bucharests. Did these fashion and beauty practices and ideas influence the cultural, social, and political milieu, or were they predominantly imposed from above? I seek to understand whether individuals had agency within this context and how adaptable they were to the shifting landscapes of their time.

FIVEBUC will thus adopt an interdisciplinary approach, combining sociological and historical methods to study the evolution of Bucharest's fashion from 1939 to 1949 and how citizens responded to successive totalitarian regimes. Drawing particularly on Simmel, Benjamin, Bourdieu, and Ginzburg, it will examine fashion as a dynamic force in shaping urban identity and ideological expression, using visual discourse and semiotic analysis to explore the symbolic power of clothing, gestures, and aesthetic choices under autocratic rule and war, with a particular focus on gender and cultural history. The goal will thus be to apply what I know so far about the interwar era and ascertain the endurance of interwar structures, practices, behaviours and ideas during and after the Second World War and into the first years of the People's Republic of Romania.

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Five Bucharests in a Decade (1939-1949): City Identity trough Fashion

Sonia-Doris Andraș

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